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COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Strengthening the role of the regional commissions in statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The Statistical Commission has called for the regional commissions to be strengthened in order to contribute to the much needed development at national statistical offices in their regions.[1,2] All regions include some countries that have severe problems, but some regions are much more disadvantaged than others.

The present report describes the regional commissions in general terms, provides some details of their activities in statistics and suggests some ways in which they could be strengthened. Annexes I to V then describe the work of each regional commission in turn. Finally, annex VI gives some information on the regional commissions in tabular form.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 8 (E/1995/28), para. 12 (f).

[2] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 9 (E/1995/29), para. 57.

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I. ORIGINS

1. The regional commissions were created at different times over a period from two to about 20 years after the creation of the United Nations itself, essentially to provide closer links among United Nations Member States and between Member States and the United Nations Secretariat, and in some instances to aid the economic reconstruction of war-devastated areas. The United Nations Secretariat at its Headquarters in New York deals directly with all of the 185 United Nations Member States for many purposes, including data collection and technical assistance in statistics, but suitably equipped regional commissions also have a crucial role to play because of their particular advantages and the common interests of the member countries within each region. The executive secretaries of the five regional commissions report directly to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

II. PROXIMITY TO COUNTRIES

2. The nature of the relationships between the regional commissions and their member countries, and among member countries within regions, is still the main strength of the regional commissions. Geographical proximity and common languages enable regional commissions to be aware of the needs, views and problems of their members. This imposes a responsibility to monitor progress and disseminate comparative data on their member countries. Equally importantly, member countries with common or related interests find a forum in the regional commissions in which they are equal partners and that gives them a collective link to the whole United Nations system and to many other international agencies. The objectivity and neutrality that are hallmarks of the United Nations are equally pertinent in the regional commissions.

III. STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

3. The statistical functions of the regional commissions may be described under five headings: (a) development and implementation of methodologies; (b) technical assistance; (c) data collection; (d) data analysis and presentation; and (e) coordination of regional statistical development.

A. Development and implementation of methodologies

4. Member countries use the regional commissions as a forum in which they can share and develop their national statistical methods and standards. By their nature, many of the functions of national statistical offices are unique within their own country but are duplicated in almost every other member country. Therefore, national statistical offices can learn from their neighbours and share experience to their mutual advantage.

5. Similarly, national statistical offices need to adopt standards that suit their own needs but also enable them to compare their results with other countries. Many statistical standards are world-level standards, but there are

also regional and subregional variants that are shared by groups of countries. Again, the regional commissions provide a forum in which such regional and subregional standards can be developed and disseminated.

6. Some standards are essentially developed at a global level and adapted to regional or local needs. Others are derived from regional recommendations and can eventually coalesce into a global standard.

7. A current priority is the implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993 (1993 SNA), which has now been accepted in principle by almost all the countries of the world but which many countries are finding very difficult to adopt in practice. There are, however, many other important topics, including social and demographic statistics, that are of current concern.

8. The development and implementation of statistical methods and standards are extremely variable among regions as well as within regions. Decisions and conclusions of the Statistical Commission have noted the enormous disparities that exist, and have emphasized the crucially important role that suitably strengthened regional commissions could play in these areas.

B. Technical assistance

9. It follows that implementation of the 1993 SNA is a priority area for technical assistance. Some technical assistance in statistics is provided by global agencies to countries throughout the world, but some is provided by regional agencies and by donor countries to their neighbours within the same region. When technical assistance is provided at the regional level, it is generally because the needs and circumstances of neighbouring countries are similar or because donors have an interest in helping their regional neighbours. A current example is the technical assistance being provided by many agencies and countries to countries in transition in Europe and the former USSR.

10. All the regional commissions are involved in technical assistance, but the Statistical Commission has noted that their involvement is insufficient to accomplish their goals despite their relative advantage in working with their own members, and it has therefore been argued that other agencies should try to involve the regional commissions more in their technical assistance projects.

C. Data collection

11. Much data collection, such as for the Commodity Trade Database and national accounts aggregates, is undertaken at the world level, essentially because it enables global comparisons and aggregations. At the regional level, many member countries are interested in more specific and more detailed data. In practice, the amount of data collection activity is very different from one region to another, reflecting the different interests and resources of the member countries in the regions concerned.

D. Data analysis and presentation

12. It is important to note that the regional commissions have their own statistical data requirements in order to undertake such functions as economic analysis or, for example, environmental assessment. Regional commissions therefore disseminate statistical data in many forms through publications and reports of their various statistical and non-statistical activities.

13. Again, the capacities of the regional commissions are insufficient to undertake the data collection and dissemination that is required of them.

E. Coordination of regional statistical development

14. The regional commissions are also an important focus of regional statistical development, through which not only member countries but also other international and regional institutions can come together to coordinate their statistical activities.

IV. RESOURCES

15. The regional commissions are relatively small and are unlikely ever to be large organizations. Indeed, with the continuing United Nations financial crisis and the pressure for restructuring, the regional commissions have less resources in the biennium 1996-1997 than in the previous period, and are intended to be reduced again in 1998-1999, although the reductions for the regional commissions are likely to be less than for other parts of the United Nations Secretariat. Being small yet having relatively close relations to their member countries, the regional commissions can expect to have relatively few independent activities but must depend on close collaboration with their member countries, with Headquarters and with other agencies.

16. The outputs and services of the regional commissions are therefore very much dependent upon the inputs of their member countries and of other agencies, both at the world level and at the regional and subregional levels. But no matter how much the regional commissions can rely on the collaboration of their members and other intergovernmental institutions, they must nevertheless have sufficient resources to enable them to play their crucially important and complementary role in conjunction with the United Nations Statistics Division in New York and other relevant bodies.

V. CONCLUSIONS

17. The present outline of the regional commissions and the more detailed descriptions of each regional commission contained in annexes I-V demonstrate that the regional commissions have in common their essential role in maintaining close relations between United Nations Member States and the United Nations Secretariat, together with other agencies. But there are many differences among the regional commissions and the circumstances in which they work, and it is

evident that they are provided with insufficient resources for the tasks that they are called upon to perform.

18. Some suggestions for ways in which the activities of all the regional commissions could be strengthened are set out below.

A. Member States

19. First, it is essential that the member countries of each of the regional commissions take an active role. The secretariats of the commissions themselves are all small and can therefore undertake relatively little substantive work on their own, but they can contribute to substantive work and provide a forum in which all member countries can work together in pursuit of shared goals. The commitment of statisticians in member countries must be at the level of the head of the national statistical offices, but effective cooperation must be at all levels. Experience in many regions has shown that national statisticians can profit very substantially by sharing experience with other countries, and by developing methods and definitions that suit their own purposes and those of their neighbours.

20. Member countries can also profit and contribute to the work of regional commissions by lending staff on a temporary basis to the statistical divisions of the regional commissions. This can be a very valuable learning experience for the staff concerned, and at the same time can provide the commissions with staff who have the right background and experience in a national statistical office. Since the regional commissions are so small, even one professional staff member can make a significant difference.

B. International organizations

21. Second, international organizations can work more with and through the regional commissions so that the regional commissions, with their close knowledge of the member countries in the region, can provide a liaison with international organizations that work at the global level. The regional commissions can also provide a forum in which countries in their regions and the international organizations can come together and coordinate their activities.

C. United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Population Fund

22. Third, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) are the main funding agencies of the United Nations, and can therefore provide extrabudgetary resources to the regional commissions by using the commissions as executing agencies for some of their projects. These are the main funding agencies, although others, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), may also provide some extrabudgetary funds. As well as increasing the total resource base available to the regional commissions, such funds can provide much needed flexibility, because although they are strictly earmarked for specific projects they may be more flexible by

allowing the possibility of shifting funds from one budget item to another within a project. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency in recent years for the funding agencies to move away from regional projects and to provide funds directly to specific countries. Although this may seem to have some advantages, that form of funding is more difficult to coordinate, is prone to duplication and reduces the effectiveness of the regional commissions. Such policies are decided not by the secretariats of the funding organizations but rather by their member countries. National statistical offices can therefore help persuade their foreign services that policies that would help to strengthen the regional commissions should be pursued.

D. United Nations regular budget

23. Fourth, United Nations regular budgets could be allocated more flexibly. Extrabudgetary funding is particularly important because the regular United Nations budget is very tightly constrained and only minuscule funds are allowed to be spent on equipment, consultancies and travel. In the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), for example, 98 per cent of the regular budget is allocated by the General Assembly to staff costs, leaving only about 2 per cent to spend on all other facilities. As a result, the statistical staff of the regional commissions are unable to attend important meetings even within their own region and even when there is no financial crisis. Indeed, frequent United Nations financial crises restrict such activities even further. The same or similar restrictions apply throughout the United Nations. Again, it is United Nations Member States through the General Assembly and its committees that decide on the allocation of financial resources in the regular budget, so that national statistical offices could use their influence on their Governments to persuade them to allow the United Nations Secretariat to operate a much more flexible and efficient allocation of funds between staff and other costs.

E. Priorities within the regional commissions

24. Fifth, member Governments could give higher priority to statistical work within the regional commissions so that more resources could be devoted to their statistical divisions, even during periods of restructuring and downsizing.

F. Statistical staff in the regional commissions

25. Finally, the statistical staff of the regional commissions themselves must actively encourage member countries and other international agencies to work with them, by showing that the regional commissions can play the role for which they were intended.

26. In the final analysis, however, the responsibility lies mainly with the statistical offices of the member countries themselves; it is they who will gain from strengthened regional commissions and it is their inputs that will make the regional commissions stronger.

Annex I

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

1. Statistics in Africa is one of the oldest programmes of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The need for the programme was identified at the inception of ECA in 1958, when at its first session it approved the implementation of a long-term development programme for the African region. It was then realized that the statistical infrastructures of ECA member countries were weak. That realization led to the establishment of the Conference of African Statisticians, which held its first session in 1959. Since then, the Conference met every other year until 1980, when it was combined with the Conferences of African Planners and the Conference of African Demographers and renamed the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Demographers and Information Scientists. In 1994, that name was changed to the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians and Population and Information Specialists. The Conference, which is one of the specialized subsidiary bodies of the ECA Conference of Ministers, meets every two years. It helps to identify regional needs, and sets priorities for ECA work in statistics. At each session of the Conference, the ECA secretariat presents a draft work programme for the four subject areas for approval. For statistics, the programme covers economic, social, demographic and environment statistics. The report of the Conference is presented to the ECA Conference of Ministers.

2. ECA maintains close contacts with the national statistics offices in all its 53 member countries mainly through meetings, advisory services and dissemination, as well as the exchange of published materials, including aggregated and comparative data. Since 1990, African countries have been celebrating African Statistics Day on 18 November in order to increase public awareness of the importance of statistics. In 1995, ECA hosted the first joint Conference of the International Association for Official Statistics and the African Statistical Association.

3. Concerted African efforts to provide opportunities for the training of an adequate number of statistical staff for national statistical offices started in 1961. Emphasis was initially placed on middle-level training, with more gradual professional facilities. But in spite of those efforts and because of staff losses, the staff position in many African statistical offices remains unsatisfactory.

4. In 1987, ECA assisted in establishing the Statistical Development Programme for Africa (SDPA), with funding support from UNDP. The three components of SDPA were: the African Household Survey Capability Programme, the Statistical Training Programme for Africa (STPA) and the National Accounts Capability Programme. Since 1993, SDPA has suffered serious setbacks due to funding constraints.

5. Apart from the SDPA project, ECA statistical development activities include the Regional Advisory Service in Demographic Statistics (RASDS) and the Inter-Census Training Programme for sub-Saharan Africa. Since the end of 1992,

RASDS has operated within the framework of the new UNFPA arrangements entitled country support teams.

6. Apart from project activities, the regular ECA programme in statistics assists member countries in developing their statistical capacities through advisory missions, with emphasis on on-the-job training, seminars and training workshops. ECA has regional advisers in the following areas: organization and management of national statistical systems; economic statistics; demographic statistics; database management; sampling; cartography; and computerized mapping.

7. ECA maintains a regional statistical database that carries socio-economic and environment data collected directly from its member countries, other data compilers and published materials. However, the database is not comprehensive. Rehabilitation of African statistical systems has emerged as a priority issue because national capacities have seriously deteriorated since the 1980s, mainly due to the weak economic conditions of ECA member countries. As a result, in 1990, the sixth session of the Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Demographers and Information Scientists formulated the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s. The Plan of Action is based on three cardinal principles: the central role of an improved statistical system in economic and social development; the key role of ECA in the development and promotion of statistics in Africa without prejudice to the role of other agencies and donors; and the need to coordinate the support provided by international agencies and donors.

8. In order to coordinate activities undertaken within the framework of the Plan of Action and monitor its implementation the Coordinating Committee on African Statistical Development was established in 1991. The membership consists of ECA member countries, regional statistical training centres participating in STPA, and African and non-African bilateral and multilateral agencies and donors.

9. The current ECA work programme in statistics is designed to assist its member countries in implementing the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s.

Annex II

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

1. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 1997. ECE does not include the word "social" in its title - although its inclusion has occasionally been proposed - because its member countries have decided that they prefer that ECE concentrate on economic topics in general and deal less with social topics. Nevertheless, the Conference of European Statisticians deals with all the statistics that are of interest to the statistical offices of its member countries, including very substantial work in social and demographic statistics.

2. ECE is fortunate in including in its membership many of the more developed countries of the world, often with well-developed statistical systems and resources that enable them to undertake research. Since its inception therefore, the Conference has been able to maintain an active programme of work based on inputs from a relatively large proportion of its membership.

3. However, there have been two major changes in about the last five years that have affected the Conference profoundly. First, there was an increase in membership from 34 to 55 countries, including 26 countries that are usually described as countries in transition, many of which are newly independent States (some of those transition countries are members of both ECE and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)).

4. The second profound change, which began many years before, was the development and growth of both the European Community and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), most of whose members are in the ECE region.

5. The main effects of those changes have been twofold. First, the Conference has made technical cooperation with the countries in transition one of its major priorities. Second, the ECE Statistical Division works very closely with the Statistical Office of the European Community (Eurostat), OECD and others, and the Conference, at its annual plenary sessions, now considers the jointly presented programmes of work of the Conference, OECD, Eurostat and all international organizations that are active in statistics in the ECE region or other OECD countries. The joint presentation is not just a loose association but is an integrated whole that is guided by a small number of objectives and expected outputs that are defined by the member countries themselves for approximately 50 different fields of statistics.

6. The main strengths of the ECE Statistical Division and the Conference of European Statisticians, therefore, derive from the interest and activity of a substantial number of ECE member countries, especially in the ECE Bureau but also in the programme of expert activities, as well as from close collaboration with Eurostat, OECD and other agencies active in the ECE region.

7. ECE, in particular the Conference of European Statisticians, has therefore become the forum in which two major bodies with more limited numbers of members

(the European Community and OECD) have been able to work efficiently and most effectively with countries in the region that are not their members for the benefit of all the countries concerned. Other international agencies, such as the United Nations Statistics Division, the International Monetary Fund, the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States, are also included in the joint work programme presentation (in so far as their work programmes have an impact in the ECE region), and the Conference is also therefore a forum in which they can work with all agencies active in the region.

8. At the same time, the Conference (which is a subsidiary body of both ECE itself and the United Nations Statistical Commission) has maintained its links with other countries in the world, particularly through the Statistical Commission. On the one hand, it is guided by standards set at the world level such as the 1993 SNA, and on the other hand some of its outputs, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, have been transmitted to other regional commissions and have also been accepted by the Statistical Commission at the world level.

9. In addition to its influence on the regular programme of work of the Conference, the increase in the number of ECE member countries, which has greatly extended the number of countries in the region in need of technical assistance, has obliged ECE to appoint regional advisers, including on economic statistics, and to seek to provide other forms of technical assistance, such as through a UNDP-funded project in social and demographic statistics.

10. The current UNDP-funded project on social and demographic statistics is an example of how a regional commission can use its expertise and its relations with its member countries if it has the necessary financial resources. It has enabled the ECE Statistical Division, in close collaboration with other international institutions and donor and recipient countries, to contribute very substantially to the statistical capacities of member countries who very much need and benefit from the technical assistance provided.

11. As of October 1996, the ECE Statistical Division is also preparing to execute a UNDP-funded project devoted to statistical systems capacity-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

12. One of the most important functions of ECE, in which the cooperation of the statistical offices of member countries is also crucial, is the collection of data in order to monitor progress in the region, especially economic progress. The ECE Statistical Division is directly responsible for much of that work, and also coordinates the data collection undertaken by other ECE divisions. Although ECE collects a wide range of data directly from its member countries, it is careful not to duplicate the data collection of other agencies but rather to share data with them. ECE is almost continuously reviewing the ECE statistical publication programme, many of which are produced by other ECE divisions, but currently has some 30 titles that include statistics.

13. In addition to all the United Nations reviews of structure and finance, the ECE member countries, through their missions at Geneva, undertook in 1996 a very

detailed review of ECE activities intended to strengthen the effectiveness of ECE and to re-establish its priorities. An important result of the review is that statistical work has been reaffirmed as a high priority area that should have a greater share of the diminishing resources of ECE.

Annex III

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

1. The role of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in statistics must be placed within the role of the United Nations system and other international organizations in the international statistical system associated with socio-economic development.

2. With the aim of presenting ECLAC activities in the area of statistics, they have been ordered under two types of functions:

(a) Establishment and implementation of international classifications, methodologies and procedures;

(b) Production of regional and international comparable statistics for Latin American and Caribbean countries.

3. Both functions pertain to the field of regional and international cooperation in the area of statistics. Under the first function, ECLAC must organize countries' contributions to the establishment of international standards, including the preparation of summaries of regional points of view. At the level of implementation, it must promote the implementation of standards, working in close contact with countries and other international organizations. Under the second function of producing comparable statistics, a very high percentage of inputs are the production of the national statistical offices in the region. Again, the function implies a very close relation with countries; in addition, the relation of ECLAC with the rest of the United Nations statistical system and other international organizations is fundamental for moving towards common practices and international comparable figures.

4. Implicit in regional activities is the recognition of the heterogeneity of the international statistical system. Although that heterogeneity also exists within the ECLAC region, it is accepted that there is an important degree of relative homogeneity in the development of countries' statistical systems and that their priorities in the field of economic and social development are similar. In fact, since the creation of ECLAC in 1948 one of its three principal functions has been to help to develop information for economic and social development.

5. In the five decades that ECLAC has been working in statistics, its role has evolved. At first, national capacities were very feeble, especially in topics such as national accounts, but over the years, capacity-building has gradually improved, and new areas have appeared. Currently, social and environmental statistics have become priorities and capacity for gathering such statistics is being built. In the first stages of capacity-building, the international system and ECLAC have normally played a major role. With time, countries have acquired experience and the horizontal cooperation has become more important and with it the role of countries. Because of these considerations, the role of ECLAC is a dynamic one: some activities have lost importance while new ones have been created. In many areas, ECLAC has acted as the executing agency of projects

financed by institutions, such as UNDP, UNFPA, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

6. In a joint effort with the secretariat of the Organization of American States, ECLAC acts as Technical Secretary of the Meeting of Directors of Statistics of the Americas. Within that meeting, a programme of activities has been developed and the functions of regional and international cooperation in the statistical field have been distributed in the areas of national accounts; environmental statistics; dissemination of information; and social and demographic indicators. In other fields, such as the institutional aspects of national statistical offices, the informal sector and external trade, less structured activities have also been defined and the objective exists of incorporating them into the regional programme. Responsibilities have been distributed among countries and international organizations. The role of ECLAC as focal point is very important but the increasing participation of countries is fundamental. This is specially important because the scope of statistical activities has increased with time while the resources for regional and international cooperation have decreased.

7. The role of ECLAC as a producer and distributor of comparable statistics has always been a very important one in the region. It should be remembered that ECLAC is at the same time a producer and user of information. Such publications as the Preliminary Overview of the Latin American and Caribbean Economies, Economic Study and Social Panorama are among the most important periodic evaluations of the economic and social development of the region. The ECLAC data banks are among the most important and reliable sources of information utilized by the public and private sector of the region, and probably constitute the most frequent source of information of the Latin American media. Finally, ECLAC normally carries out joint ventures with national statistical or economic institutions to introduce studies in the field of economic and social development. At present, working together with countries, ECLAC has carried out comparative regional studies on the macroeconomic and institutional reforms and joint publications in the field of poverty and social conditions.

8. ECLAC is working together with some developed countries and international organizations to transfer technological and methodological progress to the region. The example of CESD-Madrid,[a] which channels European Community cooperation to the region, is significant. At the same time, through ACC an effort has been made to coordinate the cooperation of the international organizations. Their participation in the meetings of directors of statistics is considered specially important.

9. Finally, relations with the United Nations Statistics Division are constant and very important both in the establishment and implementation of standards and in the production of comparable international statistics. The cooperation in the case of the Commodity Trade Database is an important example of coordination and efficiency.

Notes

[a] The Madrid branch of the European Training Centre for Economic Statisticians of Developing Countries.

Annex IV

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

1. The regional commissions are multidisciplinary in character and draw their strength not only from their orientation towards the needs of the region that they serve but also their specialization in a number of subject areas. As a United Nations body, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) maintains very strong and regular contacts with member and associate member countries at both the policy-making and technical levels. For the field of statistics in the Asia and Pacific region, the Committee on Statistics - a subsidiary body of the ESCAP Commission - is the only intergovernmental organization covering this vast area. At the same time, the ESCAP secretariat maintains close contacts with the national statistical offices. These and other factors keep ESCAP abreast of the statistical needs of its members and associate members, and better equip it in formulating and implementing relevant and useful programmes. While proximity to the countries is a definite advantage in developing geographical specialization - something difficult to achieve by entities outside the region - the marked heterogeneity among the countries of the ESCAP region calls for special skills, localized knowledge, and competence for adopting, whenever required, a case-by-case approach.

2. ESCAP plays an important role in improving the national statistical capabilities of the countries of the Asia and Pacific region through a variety of means and by functioning as a conduit between the national and global statistical systems. It promotes the exchange of technical information and country experiences; significantly contributes to skills development; and facilitates the evolution of regional norms and standards, the incorporation of regional concerns into global standards, and the promotion of those international standards.

3. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics has a well established 45-year history as a regional conference. It began as the Regional Conference of Statisticians in 1951; changed its name to the Conference of Asian Statisticians in 1957; and was renamed the Committee on Statistics in 1974, when ESCAP changed its name from the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) to ESCAP to formally incorporate social aspects of development as well as the Pacific subregion. The important role that the Committee plays is also evident in the fact that during several transformations and restructuring exercises in ESCAP, Governments have decided to keep the Committee on Statistics as a subsidiary body of ESCAP.

4. The sessions of ESCAP and the Committee on Statistics provide opportunities to review and assess national statistical activities, identify common concerns and issues, develop regional approaches to address new challenges, and strengthen coordination with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

5. Following observations by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session that the role of the regional statistical conferences and statistics divisions was vital, the Committee on Statistics paid particular attention to strengthening its role and functioning while reviewing and revising its terms of

reference in 1994. The Committee has also adopted a new approach whereby its elected officials would continue to serve as a Bureau until the next election of officials. Those arrangements entail increased recognition by the members and associate members of ESCAP of the ownership of the statistical activities of ESCAP, and ensure a continuity of leadership and guidance by the Bureau between Committee sessions. In agreeing to act as the focus of regional statistical development, the Committee has also started to develop stronger tools for coordinating various aspects of statistical activities in the region.

6. The Working Group of Statistical Experts, which usually meets in the years when the Committee session is not held, has also emerged as a useful and strong forum. Its ninth session in early 1996 was attended by 23 members and associate members, whose delegations invariably came from their capitals. Similarly, the Committee on Statistics usually attracts a strong attendance from the capitals, a feature that is not so prominent among other subsidiary bodies of ESCAP. The great interest in the statistical activities of ESCAP on the part of its members and associate members is also demonstrated in attendance at technical meetings. Since those meetings are almost always organized under extrabudgetary projects, the cost of participation for one country nominee is normally borne by ESCAP. However, many developing countries send multiple participants utilizing sources of funding available to their Governments. The ESCAP secretariat views this as a strong indication of the usefulness of its technical meetings.

7. The ESCAP secretariat promotes exchange of experience through meetings, advisory services, publications and dissemination of technical information, and helps to enhance national capacities through human resources development by organizing training courses and workshops, mainly through its training arm the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP). SIAP has its origins in actions taken by the Conference of Asian Statisticians in the 1960s, during an era of institution-building that also saw former ECAFE spawn the Asian Development Bank. The mix of technical cooperation modalities exert their impact synergistically. The technical meetings, regional training courses and workshops, and methodological publications help in the process of exchange of information on issues and topics of common concerns. Activities are also often organized on a subregional basis to attain a sharper focus. On the other hand, the ESCAP advisory services and country courses organized by SIAP provide the ability to concentrate on issues relevant to the country concerned. The strength of this approach lies in the sound linkages among various modalities and the ability of ESCAP to secure cooperation from international organizations and countries. For example, ESCAP was able to participate in the lengthy global process of the revision of the System of National Accounts and provide inputs on behalf of the Asia and Pacific region. It organized two subregional seminars to introduce the revised SNA, and is planning to organize several subregional workshops to assist developing countries in the implementation of the 1993 SNA. At the same time, advisory services are available to individual countries on the development and improvement of national accounts, while country courses can also be organized on the 1993 SNA on request by SIAP. It is this multi-pronged approach that makes it possible for ESCAP to pool scarce resources and achieve concrete results.

8. Another scenario could be illustrated by the developments following meetings on economic classifications used in population censuses; the meetings

were organized by ESCAP, with funding from UNFPA and in close cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Statistics Division, and by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand. Following the meetings, a number of countries required assistance in revising their classifications and utilizing computer-assisted coding. While advisory services were rendered by ESCAP, cooperation was sought from the ILO, the South Pacific Commission, Statistics New Zealand and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to provide technical assistance to the requesting countries. The initial meetings also provided impetus to developments, following which an expert group was established by the South Pacific Commission, with the close participation of ESCAP, for developing a variant of the International Standard Classification of Occupations for the Pacific island developing countries. This is just one of many examples of the important roles that the regional commissions play and the multiplier effects that are generated from their activities.

Annex V

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

1. In the context of reform of the United Nations in general and of the regional commissions in particular, the role of statistics divisions should be enhanced towards more efficient monitoring of progress in global and regional developments, as well as towards assisting the national statistical organizations of developing countries to become more responsive to national and international needs for timely and efficient statistics.

2. The regional commissions have the comparative advantage of being more closely linked to the member countries that they serve, and have a good and close knowledge and awareness of their specific needs, as well as of the problems they face. Thus, they are in a unique position to cooperate with their respective countries in adapting and implementing national and regional statistical programmes in response to recommendations and resolutions emanating from international conferences, summits and world communities. They can also serve as focal points for the dissemination of regional information on their respective regions. Their geographical proximity makes their activities in these areas cost-effective and more responsive to national and regional requirements.

3. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has the additional advantage that all of its member States use the same language, namely Arabic, which is considered the official language of ESCWA. Moreover, ESCWA is in the unique position of assuming an important role in the ongoing peace process in the region, a process requiring maintaining and developing the efficient and accurate data needed for monitoring and maintaining the success of the process.

4. Activities of ESCWA in the past, including the recent establishment of the ESCWA Statistics Committee, have had some impact on the development of statistics in the region. Yet the statistical departments in most of the ESCWA countries have not yet reached an acceptable level of development compared to those in more developed regions, and the rhythm of development of national statistics lags behind that in other governmental sectors. ESCWA should be able to fulfil a stronger role in the development of statistics in the region. However, in order to assume a more effective role, the mandate of its Statistics Division and the commensurate resources should be reinforced to include the following:

(a) Strengthening its capabilities as a United Nations body for carrying out international programmes and projects in the region;

(b) Strengthening its role as a coordinator of regional statistical activities, as an initiator of capacity building and institution-building activities, and as a forum for national and regional statisticians;

(c) Strengthening its role as a training centre for the development of human resources in statistics in the region;

(d) Strengthening its role as an executing agency of not only regional projects but national projects as well. In this regard, ESCWA is able to build on its experience and draw on experts within the region who have the cultural background to enable them to deal successfully and at a lower cost with national and regional situations. At present, ESCWA is excluded from many institution-building projects in the region, including those being executed in the country in which ESCWA headquarters is located;

(e) Reducing the marginalization of ESCWA within the international statistics system by allowing it to have the necessary resources needed to actively participate in international statistical programmes, activities, task forces and working groups. It should no longer be acceptable that financed international programmes and projects do not take into account the financing of their regional components;

(f) Giving ESCWA the mandate of translating technical statistical documents into Arabic. Those documents have so far been translated in New York by translators who have no knowledge of the subject matter. The translation is more often than not meaningless or misleading and wrong technically. At ESCWA, they will be translated by statisticians who understand the intended meaning of the technical terms and who know the equivalent Arabic terminology. The translation will also be revised by the staff of the Statistics Division to ensure that the translation serves the purpose for which it is intended. Indeed, at its first session, held in Amman in November 1995, the ESCWA Statistics Committee recommended that ESCWA, in cooperation with the League of Arab States and the Arab organizations concerned, work towards the unification of terminologies used in the area of statistics.

Annex VI

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

	ECA	ECE	ECLAC	ESCAP	ESCWA
Date created	1958	1947	1948	1947	1974
Member countries	53	55[a]	48	60[b]	13
Location	Addis Ababa	Geneva	Santiago	Bangkok	Amman
Frequency of meetings of intergovernmental statistical committee	biennial	annual	biennial	biennial	biennial
Statistical Division staff	30	43[c]	34[d]	31	17
Total commission staff	773	240[e]	580	720	264

[a] Of the 55 ECE member countries, 8 former USSR countries also belong to ESCAP.

[b] Of the 60 ESCAP members and associate members, 8 also belong to ECE and another 4 are non-regional members.

[c] The 43 ECE Statistical Division staff include 9 who are not involved in statistical work.

[d] Of the 34 ECLAC Statistical Division staff, 7 are not involved in statistical work.

[e] The ECE total staff is relatively few because many functions (personnel, finance etc.) are undertaken on its behalf by the United Nations Office at Geneva.

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COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General is pleased to transmit to the Statistical Commission a report on the implementation of the Review Group proposals on strengthening international statistical cooperation, which is contained in annex I. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request by the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its eighteenth session (E/CN.3/1997/19, para. 49 (c)).

* E/CN.3/1997/1.

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Annex I

REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REVIEW GROUP PROPOSALS ON STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

1. At the eighteenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination (New York, 16 to 18 April 1996), a small group (comprising Australia, the Netherlands, Brazil, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) was requested to review the implementation of the proposals contained in the report by the Review Group on strengthening international statistical cooperation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2), known as the Begeer report. The present report, which was prepared by Australia after consultation with the other members of the group, is the outcome.

2. The Begeer report was initially discussed by the Working Group at its fifteenth session (New York, 29 June to 1 July 1992). The Working Group, which agreed with the report's findings, made a number of recommendations to the Statistical Commission and reached a number of decisions on matters arising from the report. At the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission (New York, 22 February to 3 March 1993), the views of the Working Group and the findings of the Begeer report were discussed. The Commission endorsed the outcome of the Working Group discussion, with a few minor changes.' The recommendations of the Begeer report, as contained in its section IV, paragraphs 165-189, are summarized in annex II below, together with the aims of each recommendation as explained in the report, and the results of efforts to implement them.

3. The Begeer report identified the role of the global statistical system as twofold: first, to serve and support the activities of international institutions; second, to provide the world at large with statistical information for discussion, assessment and analysis at the world and regional levels. The report recognized the complexity of the international statistical system and acknowledged that the necessary coordinating bodies are in place but recommended that existing machinery be made more effective for the benefit of the system as a whole.

4. The Begeer report recognized that there are many key players in the international statistical system, including a number of specialized bodies within the United Nations system, the Statistics Divisions of the United Nations Secretariat and the regional commissions, and two important regional institutions that are not part of the United Nations system: the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Community (EC). Since the international statistical system has its foundations in the statistical systems of member States, the national statistical agencies are themselves key stakeholders, as are users of statistics.

5. The Begeer report assumed that the existing international statistical system, which is decentralized in both the subject and regional dimensions, would continue unchanged, an assumption that is critical to its recommendations. To function well the report recommended that the system needs, first,

coordination in order to achieve and maintain coherence, credibility and usefulness, and to avoid the duplication of work and waste of resources; and second, the concrete involvement of member States.

6. As indicated in annex II, the Statistical Commission has accepted most of the Review Group's recommendations. However, as also indicated in annex II, implementation of the recommendations has been uneven, particularly for some of the significant and important ones. The Commission may wish to consider whether any of the recommendations need to be pursued further.

7. As to the recommendations on the organization of coordination, which were accorded the highest priority in the report, some significant progress has been made. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities seems to be more focused on its role as a key coordinating body and is performing effectively, although the task forces set up under its auspices - with the notable exception of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics - have not been very active. In addition, under the auspices of the Statistical Commission a number of working groups on critical problems have been established in which, following the Voorburg Group model, countries are the leaders. The Expert Group on Critical Problems in Economic Statistics has identified the remaining gaps in the international work programme, as a result of which additional task forces have been established. It would be useful to extend that type of analysis to social statistics, and to ensure that similar exercises are undertaken every four or five years.

8. As to the involvement of member States in the international statistical system, a key issue, the Begeer report suggested that it should be possible for all member States to participate in the development of the global statistical system. In view of the geographically decentralized nature of the international statistical system, the report considered that the best approach was to strengthen and more clearly focus the work of the regional statistics divisions and conferences of chief statisticians, in which all countries can participate and exchange their experience. The results of the work of the regional statistics divisions and conferences of chief statisticians should be fed into the Statistical Commission, since in the opinion of the Review Group the Commission itself is not an appropriate forum for carrying out such work because its members do not represent their individual backgrounds but rather the world statistical system. Little progress has been made in implementing those important recommendations, although it is accepted that the Conference of European Statisticians contributes significantly to the Commission's discussions.

9. As to the decentralized nature of the international statistical system in terms of subject, member States should be able to take a holistic view across all subject areas of the international statistical system, which at the moment is not possible because there are no mechanisms or processes in place for doing so; the Commission itself does not have a broad enough reach and the individual components of the international statistical system are quite heterogeneous.

10. To amplify that point, three quite different examples are worth considering. First, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently promulgated a number of standards for the dissemination of statistics. Although those

standards were discussed with some statistical bodies, they were mainly negotiated through countries' central banks and finance departments since those are the country agencies that are most directly involved with IMF activities - a proper and appropriate way of doing things from the IMF point of view. However, from the point of view of the international statistical system it seems peculiar to say the least that the government statisticians of the world, as a group, did not have a direct input into the process, nor was it perceived by IMF that such an input would be appropriate. The Statistical Commission may wish to comment on whether or not that is an appropriate way of developing international statistical policy, particularly when such policy has implications far beyond the area that is sponsoring it. The question is especially relevant since the International Labour Office is on the point of developing standards for the release of labour statistics.

11. Second, standards are currently being developed on education statistics that will be considered and ratified under the banner of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). What role, in a collective sense, do government statisticians have in that process? Again, where does the Statistical Commission fit in, if at all? In asking those generic questions, it is appreciated that the Conference of European Statisticians does work closely with UNESCO.

12. Third, what is happening internationally in the important fields of crime and drug abuse statistics? Are government statisticians or the Statistical Commission involved? Much thinking needs to be done by member States about the international coordination that is needed across the various subject fields, and what they need to do to achieve it. To date, very little progress, if any, has been made on that front.

13. There is still a very strong requirement and challenge for the international statistical system to be managed in a way that allows and is seen to allow all stakeholders, particularly member States, to contribute, and that ensures that the statistical issues under consideration are relevant across the varying requirements of the member States. In addition, the view has been expressed that a small number of countries are dominating international statistical forums; whether or not that view is justified, it must be accepted that it exists. In conclusion, it remains the responsibility of the Statistical Commission to plan and implement action to further improve the organization or coordination as envisaged in the Begeer report.

Notes

* See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1993, Supplement No. 6 (E/1993/26).

Annex II

Summary of recommendations of the Review Group, aim and results

Recommendation	Aim	Result
A. Organisation of coordination (highest priority) I. Statistical Commission (a) Commission to request the Economic and Social Council to change the cycle of Commission sessions to annual meetings of eight half-days, spread over five calendar days (para 110).	To strengthen the involvement of members in the work of the Commission by having shorter more frequent meetings.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation, adding the rider that it should be on the basis of needs. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ broadly accepted that it should meet more frequently, if necessary. (There was a special Statistical Commission session in 1994, followed by a regular Statistical Commission session in 1995.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
(b) Commission to nominate members for the Bureau for next session at the end of a session; formal election at the beginning of a session.	As continuity in members of the Commission is not high, namely elected members of the Bureau (Chair, vice-chair, rapporteur) are normally not familiar with what is going on, and often not prepared for their roles.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.
Re-elect same persons a number of times to the Bureau.	To improve continuity.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.
Bureau can meet informally (paras 111-113).	To improve effectiveness.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
(c) The Statistics Division to give a copy of the "Rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council" to new members of the Bureau. Consider drafting a popular version of the "Rules" extended with practical hints (para 109).	To improve effectiveness.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.
(d) The Statistics Division to invite chairpersons of regional conferences of chief statistician to participate in the sessions (para 109).	Members of the Commission are not present because of their individual background, but as representatives of the world statistical community. For this reason chairpersons of the regional conferences of chief statisticians should participate in order for the views of countries to be heard effectively.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect. The recommendation appears to have been affected, although it was essentially only about formalising an existing informal arrangement.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
(e) Agencies to present their informational statements on paper not through lengthy oral statements. Specific items to be well prepared and well documented through ACC Subcommittee and/or the Working Group (paras 109-118).	No need for the Commission to listen to lengthy oral reports.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect. Recommendation appears to be "honoured in the breach"!
II. The Working Group (a) The Group to hold biannual meetings of two days (para 115).	The Working Group is looked upon as the executive committee of the Commission, and therefore should meet at least once between each Commission meeting.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided to make the recommendation to the Economic and Social Council that the Working Group meet once a year. (The Working Group subsequently met in 1993, 1994, 1996 and the next scheduled meeting is 1998.
(b) Commission to indicate members for the Working Group at the end of a session of the Commission; and to give preference to newly nominated members of the bureau for the next session (para 114).	To improve continuity.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
(c) The Statistics Division to invite chairpersons of regional conferences of chief statisticians to participate in the meetings (para. 117).	Members of the Working Group are not present because of their individual backgrounds, but as representatives of the world statistical community. For this reason, chairpersons of the regional conferences should participate in order for the views of countries to be heard effectively.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.
(d) The Statistics Division to prepare short reports of meetings. Results of meetings mainly to be specific documentation for the Commission (para 116).	The outputs of the Working Group should be reports/ advice for the Commission. Therefore, there is no need for lengthy reports.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.
III. ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities (a) The Statistics Division and agencies to place more emphasis on coordination aspects (paras 90-91);	To see the Statistics Division picks up its coordinating functions which were ascribed to it in the nuclear session in 1946.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect.

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Recommendation	Aim	Result
(b) ACC Subcommittee to form ad hoc groups for special topics (paras 89 and 118);	The report suggested the ACC could contribute more on the coordination front, and suggested this would be aided if the ACC reported on specific and general topics to the Working Group and the Statistical Commission.	While the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation, it considered that the recommendation had been substantially met through the task force mechanism. Two task forces (national accounts and international trade statistics) had been created prior to the fifteenth session of the Working Group, and the fifteenth session created a further four (industrial and construction statistics, finance statistics, price statistics including ICP, and environment statistics). The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that Working Group recommendation would take place with immediate effect. Subsequently, other task forces have been created.
(c) No lengthy report of the meetings for Commission: specific documentation for Commission through the Working Group (para 118).	To ensure that key issues discussed are easily identifiable.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ accepted this recommendation. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that this would take place with immediate effect. This appears to be working in practice, although reading the reports is still a tedious exercise!

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Recommendation	Aim	Result
IV. Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat (a) To strengthen the role of serving the purposes and work of the Commission (para 119);	To have the Statistics Division better serve the work of the Commission.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ changed this recommendation somewhat, by adding the words "to find ways" to the beginning of the recommendation. It also decided to request the Statistics Division to present options to the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission on ways this could be achieved. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ decided that the Working Group recommendation would take place with immediate effect.
(b) To place more emphasis on coordination aspects: (para. 119).	To have the Statistics Division better serve the international statistical system.	Same as above.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
V. Strengthening the role of regional statistics divisions and conferences of chief statisticians (a) Commission to advise regional commissions through the Economic and Social Council to strengthen statistics divisions; Commission to advise regional commissions through the Council to promote the establishment of conferences of chief statisticians in those cases where they do not already exist (paras 92, 107-108, 120).	To attain a more equal level of performance. To correct imbalances in the strength of national statistical systems. To identify structural solutions to make it possible that all member states can participate in the development of a better global system, and to improve coordination.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ established a drafting group to prepare recommendations concerning the role of the regional statistical conferences and statistical divisions, to be put forward to the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission. This does not appear to have occurred. The issue "strengthening the role of regional commissions in statistics" was discussed at the Working Group (17th session), where it was decided that a paper would be prepared for the next Working Group session. A background report was subsequently prepared by ECE, ESCAP and ESCWA. The Working Group (18th session) agreed that the report be updated to take account of comments from the Working Group for consideration at the twenty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
(b) Statistical Commission to request agencies working at world level to cooperate to the fullest extent with regional statistics divisions and conferences of chief statisticians on statistics, standards and technical assistance (para 132-137);	To achieve better coordination and cooperation in the international statistical system.	Same as above.
(c) Regional Conferences of chief statisticians should be more involved in the development/ revisions of standards and in technical assistance projects. Statistics divisions should be involved in pilot studies to test draft standards and in drafting adapted handbooks. Statistics divisions should be involved in monitoring the adherence to adopted standards.	To ensure close cooperation, division of labour, sharing of work and avoidance competition, as well as an optimal use of resources.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ established a drafting group to prepare recommendations concerning the role of the regional statistical conferences and statistical divisions, to be put forward to the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
VI. Substantive aspects of coordination Integrated work programmes and improved documentation (high priority) (a) The Statistics Division in cooperation with international agencies to develop a (hierarchical) classification of statistical subjects as a basis for programmes and coordination (paras 51-55);	To enable programmes of work of different agencies to be described in a common framework which will allow the identification of gaps and overlaps.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ requested that the Statistics Division and ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities present inter-agency planning reports on a subject basis where feasible at the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission. (The "on a subject basis" of the decision loses the "integrated" thrust of the Begeer recommendations.) No such reports appear to have been presented, although reports on the overall review of statistical work of international organisations and the work of the UNSD were presented. The Statistical Commission requested some improvements, and that similar reports be prepared for the twenty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission. There were a number of plans and work programs presented to the twenty-eighth session, and the plans were endorsed by the Statistical Commission.

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Recommendation	Aim	Result
(b) On the basis of the classification the Commission to oversee the development of: (i) A (descriptive) integrated programme on data collection, data processing and dissemination of statistics; (ii) A (descriptive) integrated programme on construction/revision of standards; (iii) A (descriptive) integrated programme on technical assistance (The three programmes should be related and pay attention to the available resources). (paras 149 and 150)	To clearly describe the distribution of activities among agencies and to establish cooperation agreements between them.	The Working Group also decided that there were six areas where the need for review was considered a high priority. These areas were covered either by existing task forces (national accounts and international trade statistics) or would be covered by four new task forces established by the Working Group (Industrial and Construction statistics, finance statistics, price statistics including ICP, and environment statistics). The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ strongly endorsed this decision. Other task forces have been subsequently established.
(c) The Statistics Division to update and improve the documentation on the global statistical system, so that this documentation is related to the above-mentioned programmes (para 155 and 156).	Continual updating of documentation is instrumental for an integrated statistical program strongly endorsed this decision.	

Recommendation	Aim	Result
B. Standards (high priority) (a) Set up a system for monitoring the adherence to adopted United Nations classifications, including a description of the present situation on the adoption of classifications in the member countries and their relationship with adopted United Nations classifications (para 129);	To identify situations where standards have been set wrongly, or where countries need technical assistance.	The Working Group essentially accepted this recommendation, adding that a progress report should be provided to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-eighth session. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ endorsed this recommendation, charging the UNSD with responsibility for the work, but no such report was presented to the twenty-eighth session.
(b) A discussion paper is required on the advantages and disadvantages of more flexible standards (classifications, etc.). Concentrate in first instance on classifications for economic activities and commodities (ISIC, Rev 3 and NACE.1,etc)(para 74-79, 122-131);	By overcoming the problems of fixed standards, achieve greater compatibility of statistics, where each country can adopt a version of a standard that fits into the commonly developed system.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ recommended that such a discussion paper should be presented to the twenty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ requested that the Working Group consider it as a possible special topic for the twenty-eighth session. An Expert Group on International Classifications was subsequently established, which reported to the twenty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission; however, its report appears to have concentrated on coordination of work on classifications, rather than the issue of possible flexibility in classifications.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
(c) Continued efforts to reduce duplication in collecting and processing data from member countries (see "Inventory"). (paras 102, 132-137) The Commission may request the Statistics Division and the ACC Subcommittee to give this continual attention. Progress report at each session of the Commission along the lines of chapter 1 of the "Inventory".	To reduce duplication in collecting and processing data.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ recommended that the Statistical Commission should request the Statistics Division and the ACC Subcommittee to give continual attention to this issue, and request a progress report to each session of the Commission. The twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ endorsed this recommendation, adding that the report be organised along subject matter lines. No report was provided to the twenty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission, which requested that report be provided to the 18th session of the Working Group. This was done, essentially in the form of a list of collections, without comment.
(d) On the basis of the classification of statistical subjects develop a programme for auditing statistics, disseminated in whatever form by the Statistics Division, the statistics divisions and the other agencies in the United Nations system (paras 138-148).	Through analysing and evaluating statistics disseminated by international agencies, enforce better coordination in dissemination and enhance confidence in the performance of the international statistical system.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ requested that the task forces investigate ways to carry out evaluations and carry them out as far as possible. This loses the "holistic" and "coordinated" nature of the Begeer recommendation. This decision was endorsed by the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/

Recommendation	Aim	Result
C. <u>A review of publications (high priority)</u> (a) Consider the review undertaken by the Conference of European Statisticians. Set up a similar review. This item primarily concerns the publications in printed or similar form, but the relationship with machine readable forms of dissemination should be taken into accounts (para 157).	To ensure that only useful publications are produced.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ requested the task forces to address this issue in the course of their review of particular subject areas. This decision was endorsed by the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission.2/

Recommendation	Aim	Result
D. <u>An inventory of gaps and weaknesses in the international statistical system (high priority)</u> (a) On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation an effort should be made to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances in the current programme. In such a process budgetary aspects should be taken into account (paras 158-163);	To identify gaps, weaknesses and imbalances in international statistics.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ requested the various task forces carry out this task in their particular subject areas. This loses the "holistic" nature of the Begeer recommendations, but to a certain extent this was picked up by the later-established expert group on critical problems in economic statistics.
(b) Besides the continuation of efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators) (para 164).	To respond to needs for (preliminary) recent data for short-term provisional indicators on recent developments.	The fifteenth session of the Working Group 1/ requested the various task forces carry out this task in their particular subject areas.

Recommendation	Aim	Result
E. <u>Authoritative advice of the Statistical Commission</u> The role of the Statistical Commission is mainly an advisory one. However, this role should be strengthened in the interest of the global statistical system. In this report the potential role of the Commission is emphasised. On the basis of the proposals made earlier in this report this role should be used to: (a) Give authoritative advice on the allocation of statistical subjects to the agencies. This allocation concerns statistical work, development/revision of standards and technical assistance; (b) And on the detailed agreements between the agencies on cooperation regarding the actual	To use the professional influence of the Statistical Commission to achieve more cooperation/coordination between international agencies.	This recommendation was accepted by the Working Group 1/, and the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission 2/ subsequently decided that its role should include these activities.

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Notes

[1] Report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its fifteenth session (E/CN.3/1993/21).

[2] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1993, Supplement No. 6 (E/1993/26).

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COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Assessment of the work of the inter-agency task forces established by the Statistical Commission in relation to their mandates

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present report provides an account of the origins, mandates and the achievements of the inter-agency task forces established by the Statistical Commission over the period 1993-1994.

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its eighteenth session (New York, 16-19 April 1996), the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination decided that, for the twenty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission, an overall assessment should be carried out of the results of the task force initiative, in relation to the terms of reference of the task forces (E/CN.3/1997/19, para. 20 (d)). In order to prepare the present report the United Nations Statistics Division analysed all relevant documents discussed by the Statistical Commission, its Working Group and the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities. The draft report was then sent to the conveners of the task forces for their comments and additional information. All comments received from the conveners are included in the present report.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCES

A. Establishment of six task forces

2. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, at its fifteenth session (New York, 29 June-1 July 1992), identified six subject areas in which a need for review was considered a priority. The Working Group noted that task force mechanisms already existed for two of the areas, established new task forces for the other four, and with the agreement of the agencies concerned, appointed conveners for each of the task forces as follows:

Task Force	Convener
System of National Accounts[a]	Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA)
Industrial and Construction Statistics	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
International Trade Statistics[a]	World Trade Organization (WTO) (formerly General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade)
Finance Statistics	International Monetary Fund (IMF)
Price Statistics including the International Comparison Programme	Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat)
Environment Statistics	United Nations Statistics Division

[a] Already existing mechanism.

3. The Statistical Commission, at its twenty-seventh session (New York, 22 February-3 March 1993), based on the recommendations of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, strongly endorsed the establishment of the above-mentioned six task forces.[1]

B. Terms of reference of the first six task forces

4. The terms of reference for the above-mentioned six task forces were identified by the Working Group as follows:[2]

(a) Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way;

(b) Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses imbalances and priority gaps;

(c) Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible;

(d) Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics, and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users;

(e) Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination;

(f) Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group;

(g) In line with the recommendations of the independent Review Group, the task forces were requested to investigate ways to carry out evaluations and carry them out as far as possible;

(h) In addition, in line with the recommendations of the independent Review Group, the task forces were requested to carry out the following in their particular subject areas:

(i) On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, make an effort to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances on the current programme. In such a process, budgetary questions should be taken into account;

(ii) In addition to continuing efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators).

C. Establishment of two additional task forces

5. The Statistical Commission, at its special session (New York, 11-15 April 1994), based on the recommendations of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its twenty-seventh session (Geneva, 6-8 September 1993) and its Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its sixteenth session (Geneva, 13-16 September 1993), agreed to the establishment of the Task Force on Service Statistics and the Task Force on the Measurement of Poverty.

6. The terms of reference of the Task Force on the Measurement of Poverty were established as follows:

(a) Undertake a review of current practices in the measurement of poverty with a view to determining the principal approaches, concepts, sources of data and use of poverty indicators, and the degree to which data comparability exists;

(b) Identify international agencies engaged in work on poverty data, and consider how their compilation practices, analytical methodologies and dissemination may be better coordinated;

(c) Develop a plan, if feasible, to make further progress in setting international standards.

II. INITIAL REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF THE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCES

7. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities, at its twenty-seventh session, reviewed the existence of the task forces (see E/CN.3/1994/4, para. 17) and:

(a) Agreed that the task forces constituted an important initiative for improving substantive coordination and statistical development, and that some positive results were already apparent, although the task forces were at varying stages of development and progress in their work;

(b) Agreed that the task forces should not be seen as permanent bodies, and that their continuation should depend on specific needs and outputs, and requested each task force to address that question in respect of its own objectives and progress towards achieving them;

(c) Agreed that the task forces should take a flexible and pragmatic approach to the involvement of national representatives in the work of the task forces, and recognized that such involvement might not be necessary for each task force. Such involvement could take the form of providing either specific expertise or else a means of information-sharing in support of the inter-agency decision-making process;

(d) Requested the task forces to establish clear priorities and timetables for their tasks, taking account of priorities set by the Subcommittee and

relevant intergovernmental bodies. The Subcommittee recognized that individual agencies involved in more than one task force would also have to set priorities for their support of the work of those task forces; organizations would need to continue to assign the necessary resources to ensure the success of the task forces;

(e) Requested the task forces to ensure appropriate regional representation or otherwise take fully into account the regional dimension of statistical work and its coordination;

(f) Requested the task forces to share fully and widely with involved organizations relevant information about their work. Improved mechanisms needed to be explored for the efficient and rapid transmission of information, including modern telecommunications. In particular, experimental use of a bulletin-board approach was suggested;

(g) Accepted the concept of burden-sharing, including cost-sharing, on a voluntary basis for activities undertaken by the task forces. The exact approach would have to be developed within the context of each task force and of the priorities, resources and administrative and budgetary requirements of each participating organization.

8. As to the establishment of new task forces, the Subcommittee agreed (see E/CN.3/1994/4, para. 26) that:

(a) The number of task forces should be kept very limited and consistent with resources that could be assigned to them; the task forces were resource-intensive and selectivity in establishing them in priority areas was crucial;

(b) Any existing coordination groups should be taken into account, and should be used to the extent that they could meet established objectives;

(c) In establishing a new task force, the following conditions should be met:

(i) The area should be a priority area;

(ii) It should involve a number of international agencies;

(iii) An established need or problem should exist;

(iv) The subject or activity coverage should be clearly defined;

(v) Terms of reference should be established in advance.

9. Finally, the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, at its eighteenth session, concluded that the Task Force on Price Statistics including the International Comparison Programme (ICP) had fulfilled its mandate, and agreed with the recommendation of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities that that Task Force be discontinued. The Working Group also accepted the recommendation of the Task Force on the Measurement of Poverty that the it be discontinued.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCES

10. The following provides a review of the work done by each of the task forces:

(a) Inter-agency task force on industrial and construction statistics

(Convener: OECD)

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way.	A survey on country practices and intentions with respect to the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 3 (ISIC, Rev.3) has been conducted. In the light of the findings, the following options have been suggested for promoting greater harmony in the adoption and use of economic classifications: (a) assisting countries that have no means either now or in the near future to undertake a large-scale conversion to ISIC, Rev.3; (b) establishing: (i) a group of dedicated full-time experts, presumably based in each of the regional commissions and coordinated by a full-time expert based in the United Nations Statistics Division; (ii) a data bank of common problems and their solution; (iii) creating a hotline based in the United Nations Statistics Division, designed not so much to promote common principles and conventions as to reply to queries about inclusions within and exclusions from ISIC, Rev.3; (iv) distributing to all countries concerned a sufficient number of copies of the trilateral concordance.

Terms of reference	Achievements
2. Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps.	Granted that the data-collection work carried out by international organizations has not been duplicated, this does not by itself promote coherence, particularly since international organizations have hitherto chosen which edition of ISIC they wish their members to report in. The current situation is incoherent in several respects and risks becoming more so. The scope of the Task Force has been extended to statistics on goods, which have traditionally been classified under construction statistics. An expert group meeting was convened in New York in September 1995, and the International Recommendations for Construction Statistics have been revised.
3. Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible.	
4. Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics, and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users.	
5. Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination.	The Task Force has requested that OECD develop an experimental matrix of international industrial data use, in which the cells show the degree to which each variable in industrial statistics is used by different types of governmental and international bodies, for different policy issue areas. All members of the Task Force may be asked to conduct a similar study.
6. Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.	The Task Force periodically reports to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group.

Terms of reference	Achievements
7. On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, make an effort to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances on the current programme. In such a process, budgetary questions should be taken into account.	
8. In addition to continuing efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators).	

(b) Inter-agency task force on environment statistics

(Convener: United Nations Statistics Division)

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way.	Environment statistics: methodological work has been carried out by several members including the United Nations Statistics Division, OECD, Eurostat, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and some of the regional commissions in different subject areas and regions. Data collection has been carried out by several members, including UNEP, OECD, Eurostat and some of the regional commissions. Technical cooperation has been carried out by several members.

Terms of reference	Achievements
	Environmental indicators: several members have developed frameworks and lists of indicators. The United Nations Statistics Division has developed a list, in collaboration with the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics. The list was approved by the Statistical Commission for international data compilation by the Statistics Division from national statistical services.
	Environmental accounting: the Statistics Division has issued a handbook of national accounting on integrated environmental and economic accounting. Other members, including FAO, WHO, Eurostat, UNEP, the World Bank and some of the regional commissions, have carried out methodological work in particular fields of environmental accounting. In the area of technical cooperation, several members have been active, including the United Nations Statistics Division, UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic Commission for Europe and the World Bank.
2. Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps.	In the fields of environmental statistics and indicators, the major gaps are the lack of practical manuals that include clear definitions, classifications and tabulation, for use at the international, regional and national levels. There is duplication in indicator development by international organizations. There is also a gap in the availability of comparable environmental statistics and indicators at the international level.

Terms of reference	Achievements
	In the field of environmental accounting, there is still no consensus on a range of concepts and methodological questions, notably in valuation. The London group was set up to address those issues; that group, however, comprises industrialized countries and selected organizations only. There is duplication in the area of technical cooperation: for instance, in some countries, different sponsors have been advancing different approaches with different national organizations at the same time. Since that kind of work is still in an early stage of development such duplication may be unavoidable for the time being.
3. Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible.	
4. Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics, and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users.	
5. Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination.	The Task Force could not agree on a coordinated work programme to date, agreeing only on an integrated presentation of work, due to the different mandates of the respective governing bodies of Task Force members. The response rate by Task Force members to questions related to coordinated action (gaps, strategies, goals and milestones) was low. Also, most of the Task Force members felt that a second meeting was unnecessary at this stage.
6. Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.	The Task Force periodically reports to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group.

Terms of reference	Achievements
7. On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, make an effort to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances on the current programme. In such a process, budgetary questions should be taken into account.	Methodological and programmatic issues in environmental statistics and accounting are being addressed by the London group (environmental accounting) and the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics (environmental statistics and indicators).
8. In addition to continuing efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators).	As agreed by the Statistical Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division will conduct a compilation of selected environmental indicators for the first time from national statistical services. No comprehensive international compilation of environmental accounts is envisaged. The Statistics Division plans an assessment of national projects.

(c) Inter-agency task force on international trade statistics

(Convener: WTO)

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way.	A revision to international merchandise trade concepts and definitions has been undertaken; a final report is before the Commission for its approval.

Terms of reference	Achievements
	The development of estimates and adjustments to reported data to conform to international trade concepts and definitions. Trade estimates are now exchanged on a regular basis among international organizations. Regarding adjustments, the Statistical Commission has agreed with a recommendation of the Task Force to stop work, except on adjustments for free on board/cost, insurance, freight, and the systems of trade, in view of the complexity in developing adjustments by country at the detailed commodity level.
	Major improvements have been made in the coverage of the United Nations Statistics Division's Commodity Trade Database (COMTRADE), resulting from a more structured approach in follow-up procedures and a more coordinated approach in the exchange of data collected for their own needs among international organizations.
	Some 76 country-periods of trade data have been incorporated into COMTRADE to cover the earlier years with no data, based on inputs received from the participating agencies of the Task Force.
	Increased use by the United Nations Statistics Division of IMF trade data for total imports and exports, unit values/price and volume indexes for publication purposes.
	Research into the use of Eurostat data in COMTRADE and of use by OECD of COMTRADE data.
	Agreement with the United Nations Statistics Division proposal to convert the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) 92 and HS 96 data to HS 88.

Terms of reference	Achievements
	A report on the use of non-standard HS codes for confidential and security reasons.
	Agreement not to proceed with a formal revision of the Standard International Trade Classification, revision 3 (SITC, Rev.3) in order to keep SITC in line with HS but to circulate only concordance tables.
	Research report by UNCTAD on a system of trade deflators based on detailed bilateral commodity trade data.
	Contribution of experts from international organizations to two training workshops (i.e. Moscow and Addis Ababa).
	Exchange of information on EUROTRACE (Eurostat) and ASYCUDA (UNCTAD) and other technical cooperation projects to enhance coordination.
2. Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps.	A study has been undertaken to compare the trade data published by different international organizations for the same countries in order to identify the reasons for discrepancies and to make recommendations.

Terms of reference	Achievements
	Research by the United Nations Statistics Division into sourcing Eurostat data will reduce response burden on national statistical offices, improve timeliness in the receipt of data, reduce the cost of processing by the Statistics Division, and provide comparable data for European Union (EU) members in the Commodity Trade Database (COMTRADE), as well as comparability with data for other countries in COMTRADE. Similarly, OECD has undertaken research into the use of COMTRADE for non-EU OECD countries. The United Nations Statistics Division has increased its use of IMF total trade data and unit value (see achievements under item 1 above). The Statistics Division has adopted IMF national currency trade values and indexes for nearly all countries, and is currently addressing the issue of divergency in dollar conversions.
3. Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible.	A questionnaire on country reporting practices of merchandise trade has been developed and the results published. Proposals have been made to the World Customs Organization (WCO) for the separate identification in the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) of goods for military use. Members of the Task Force have been actively involved in the revisions of HS at WCO, and in activities related to the implications and requirements of trade agreements. See also achievements under item 4 below.

Terms of reference	Achievements
4. Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics, and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users.	An in-depth review of some 71 publications on trade statistics has been undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division with the objective of identifying commonalities in output and timing, and the most notable discrepancies in reported data. A further concern was the relationship among the building blocks (aggregates) in the different publications. The findings were that the publication of aggregate totals in a range of publications were useful to users; different aggregations were designed to meet different needs; and although differences in numbers exist, there is a broad degree of consistency that is improving as reconciliation exercises are completed and common sourcing of data is increased.
5. Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination.	With the introduction of HS data, rationalization of the content of the COMTRADE database has taken place in terms of the different versions of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) and HS. Ongoing work of WCO in the development of a commodity database and of standard units of quantity will improve the quality of the content of COMTRADE. A Windows-based personal computer user interface for COMTRADE was developed jointly by the United Nations Statistics Division and the International Computing Centre. Data is regularly exchanged between IMF and the United Nations Statistics Division for publication purposes. HS now includes details for petroleum products. Regarding price and volume indices, it has been agreed that 1990 will be selected as the base year for statistical series.

Terms of reference	Achievements
	The World Bank's TARS software for COMTRADE has been redesigned, in a comparative effort by the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the World Bank. A CD-ROM-based integrated database application has been developed jointly by the World Bank and WTO.
6. Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.	The Task Force periodically reports to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group.
7. On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, make an effort to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances on the current programme. In such a process, budgetary questions should be taken into account.	Budgetary constraints of some of the participating agencies have resulted in delays and cutbacks in the original work plan of the Task Force. In particular, work on estimation techniques had to be stopped and the future of work on trade deflators is uncertain.
8. In addition to continuing efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators).	Efforts have been made to improve timely publication and consistency in the estimates for total exports and imports that are now exchanged on a regular basis among agencies.

(d) Inter-agency task force on finance statistics

(Convener: IMF)

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way.	The Task Force has conducted a survey of international organizations to determine work being done in finance statistics and the scope of ongoing technical assistance programmes.
2. On the basis of an integrated presentation of work programmes, assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps.	In addition to the survey of international organizations, the Task Force has corresponded with the authorities (national statistical offices, ministries of finance and central banks) in a number of industrial and developing countries to determine their concerns, both as producers and users of finance statistics. The Task Force has noted the considerable and probably increasing degree of data-sharing among international organizations, and has drawn attention to the development of statistical methodologies in finance statistics (balance of payments, government finance and monetary and financial statistics) to make them consistent with the 1993 SNA. The Task Force has concluded that the work programmes of international organizations in finance statistics are reasonably well coordinated and focused on user needs.

Terms of reference	Achievements
3. Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the databases maintained by international organizations, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible.	As a result of its survey of international organizations and its correspondence with users, the Task Force has concluded that international organizations, through their statistical publications in finance statistics, have played a useful role in supplementing national statistical publications. The Task Force has concluded that user needs are being met.
4. Review the publications issued by each organization, and make recommendations concerning the need for a guide to finance statistics, taking account of the needs of the range of users.	The Task Force does not see a need for a guide to finance statistics.
5. Identify actions needed to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination.	The Task Force has concluded that the work of international organizations in finance statistics is generally well coordinated.
6. Report on actions taken, present proposals, and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.	A written report was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-eighth session, together with a summary of discussions at the second meeting of the Task Force. A second written report of the Task Force is before the Commission.
7. In addition to continuing efforts to reduce the time lag in publication, consider the need and scope for disseminating more recent statistical information, possibly in the form of indicators.	The Task Force has concluded that finance statistics are published by international organizations on a timely basis. The Task Force does see a need for additional indicators in finance statistics to be included in the statistical publications of international organizations.

(e) Inter-agency Task Force on National Accounts

(Convener: ISWGNA)

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way.	The ISWGNA support system consists of: (a) manuals, handbooks, compilation manuals and software in support of national accounting compilation; (b) meetings, training seminars and workshops, ad hoc and programmed courses in national accounts and related subjects, and training materials for use in those countries; (c) research activities designed to solve conceptual and practical problems in implementing the new system; (d) technical cooperation projects in individual countries.
2. Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps.	ISWGNA monitors the activities of its member organizations, including the regional commissions, in providing a support system for helping countries to implement the System of National Accounts (SNA). ISWGNA regularly reviews the activities of its members to identify gaps, avoid duplication and develop common standards and recommendations.
3. Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible.	ISWGNA, with the support of the regional commissions, has conducted a country survey on SNA implementation plans and needs for international support. ISWGNA has also defined milestones to characterize the degree of SNA implementation for each individual country.
4. Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics, and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users.	ISWGNA regularly discusses all proposed methodological publications of any of its five member organizations.
5. Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination.	ISWGNA has agreed on a common questionnaire system, under which each country responds to only one international organization reporting national accounts data.

Terms of reference	Achievements
6. Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.	The Task Force periodically reports to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group, giving an integrated presentation of its members' work programmes in support of SNA implementation.
7. On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, make an effort to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances on the current programme. In such a process, budgetary questions should be taken into account.	See achievements under item 2 above.
8. In addition to continuing efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators).	ISWGNA has no mandate to review its member organizations' publication of data.

(f) Inter-agency Task Force on Price Statistics including the International Comparison Programme

(Convener: Eurostat)

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way.	Connection between the ICP and national consumer price indexes (CPIs) is currently underplayed. The Task Force could act as a stimulant in opening up and establishing permanent links between the ICP and national CPIs.
2. Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps.	

Terms of reference	Achievements
3. Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible.	
4. Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics, and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users.	
5. Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination.	
6. Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.	The Task Force periodically reports to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group.
7. On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, make an effort to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances on the current programme. In such a process, budgetary questions should be taken into account.	
8. Besides the continuation of efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators).	

(g) Inter-agency Task Force on Service Statistics

Convener: OECD

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it is recognized that technical cooperation may not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but may need to be reviewed in an integrated way.	Work has focused on the statistical requirements of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Work on other kinds of service statistics, such as statistics of production and employment in service industries, will depend on the findings of the investigation currently being conducted by the United Nations Statistics Division.
2. Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps.	
3. Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs, and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible.	
4. Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics, and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users.	
5. Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination.	
6. Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.	The Task Force periodically reports to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group.
7. On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, make an effort to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances on the current programme. In such a process, budgetary questions should be taken into account.	

Terms of reference	Achievements
8. In addition to continuing efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators).	

IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

11. The Commission may wish to:

(a) Consider the achievements of the various task forces since their establishment;

(b) Decide on the continuation of the work of each task force.

Notes

[1] See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1993, Supplement No. 6 (E/1993/26).

[2] See E/CN.3/1993/21, paras. 53, 65 and 68.

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COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Assessment of the work of the inter-agency task forces established by the Statistical Commission in relation to their mandates

Report of the Secretary-General

Corrigendum

Replace subparagraph 10 (g) with the following:

(g) Inter-agency Task Force on Service Statistics
(Convener: OECD)

Terms of reference	Achievements
1. Strengthen cooperation between international organizations in the area of services statistics; liaise with other agencies or groups involved with service statistics. Promote the development of international standards, systems and classifications for service statistics. Improve the availability, quality and international comparability of services statistics. Facilitate the provision of technical assistance in service statistics to developing countries.	WTO conducted a comparative study on trade-in-services publications of IMF, Eurostat and OECD on travel and transportation. A presentation was made of the Joint OECD-Eurostat Trade-in-Services Classification consistent with the fifth edition of the IMF Balance of Payments Manual. Discussion was held on the outline of a manual on trade-in-services statistics.

* E/CN.3/1997/1.

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Terms of reference	Achievements
2. Focus on the statistical requirements of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).	A WTO questionnaire was prepared on modes of supply of services in the GATS. A joint OECD-Eurostat questionnaire on foreign affiliates trade statistics was prepared.
3. Serve as a forum for the communication of information on requirements and resources, and offer an opportunity for the rationalization of efforts.	An inventory of the activities and requirements of international institutions in the area of trade-in-services statistics was prepared. A report was submitted to the Statistical Commission.

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COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Coordination of statistical data collection

Report of the Secretary-General

1. At its twenty-eighth session (New York, 27 February-3 March 1995), the Statistical Commission requested the United Nations Statistics Division to submit an updated version of the Inventory on Statistical Data-collection Activities to the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, after review by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities.[1]

2. At its eighteenth session (New York, 16-18 April 1996), the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination noted with satisfaction the work done by the United Nations Statistics Division in updating the Inventory of Statistical Data-collection Activities which had been collected from international organizations/agencies (E/CN.3/1997/19, para. 41). The Inventory is available both in printed form and as a machine-readable database.

3. During the discussion at the eighteenth session of the Working Group, the issue of the usefulness and effectiveness of the Inventory of Statistical Data-collection Activities in the work of international organizations was raised. Following the discussion, the United Nations Statistics Division sent letters to members of the Working Group requesting an answer to the following questions: (a) Has your organization used the Inventory in its work for the past two years? For example has it used the Inventory in the process of introducing a new questionnaire? (b) Do you think the Inventory is an effective coordination tool in the coordination of data-collection activities among international

* E/CN.3/1997/1.

statistical organizations/agencies? (c) In what way can use of the Inventory be improved in order to eliminate overlapping and duplication of data collection?

4. Based on the replies received, the following general conclusion may be drawn, namely, that only three international organizations/agencies had used the Inventory for the past two years in their decision-making process concerning new data collection. Some of the international organizations/agencies concluded that the Inventory was not a very effective tool for coordination, based on the following arguments:

(a) Specialists in the subject-matter area are likely to use other tools, most especially their own knowledge, to find available statistics for their use;

(b) Its main use is as a guide to who does what, that is to say, as an information tool or reference guide. It would not be appropriate to use it when setting up a questionnaire, as it cannot be completely up-to-date (the current version contains information that is two years old) and it is not always specific about what is being collected (it contains, at best, a list of variables and, at worst, general statements);

(c) A coordination tool is of use only if it is guaranteed to be comprehensive. In general, such inventories refer only to regular data collection, not taking into account ad hoc activities as well;

(d) There is a size aspect: if it is to be used as a coordination tool, it must be available to those at the working level who might be interested even in only a small extract from it. Therefore, the ability to pick out parts would be useful. Distributing it on diskette, rather than on paper, was a step forward, but if it was stored in database format, such extraction might be easier;

(e) The best way of combating duplication of data collection is to encourage countries to immediately signal the areas where they notice its occurrence. Then, efforts would be concentrated in dealing with those areas where the problem is known to exist, rather than in wasting a large amount of time looking for needles in haystacks which may or may not exist;

(f) Improvements in metadata, standardization of classifications and similar factors are more likely than the Inventory to be useful in reducing duplication.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

5. The Commission may wish to decide on the matter of the continuation of the Inventory of Statistical Data-collection Activities.

Notes

[1] See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 8 (E/1995/28), para. 91.